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JrCOSTEP – Summer 2005  
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I first heard about the COSTEP from a good friend of mine who participated in two COSTEPs in previous summers. Upon her return to school after each summer I would ask her, “So what exactly did you do?” Her response was always “A little bit of everything. It’s hard to explain.” She continued and told me all sorts of things she did, from testing water wells around Oklahoma for point source contamination to running the rabies clinic on the Navajo Reservation. After hearing about all her experiences and about all the professional skills she gained, I decided it was time for me to apply for a COSTEP position.

At first, I was a little unsure of my skills for the job, since this was my first internship in the Environmental Health field, but my preceptor, Stephen Piontkowski, was very reassuring. He greeted me very warmly my first day and took me through my work schedule for the summer. From day one, I knew what to expect and was given the opportunity to tailor my work schedule according to my educational and professional interests. My preceptor also challenged me to take on many projects by myself, but always made sure that I was comfortable with the added responsibility beforehand.

I was stationed in San Carlos, Arizona working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe. I lived off the Reservation in a small town named Miami, Arizona which ended up enriching my COSTEP experience since I had family in the area. I was very lucky and was able to spend three months living with my grandmother. Just like all the COSTEPS before me, I assisted my preceptor with all different kinds of general Environmental Health tasks as well as doing many on my own. I prepared for and conducted the annual rabies clinic, conducted mosquito trapping on the reservation as a part of the Arizona Department of Health Services West Nile virus surveillance program, assisted with home visits for different issues such as rodent infestations, excessive trash, etc., followed up on animal bites to determine if there was risk of rabies virus to the patients who were bitten, surveyed different food establishments, buildings, and campgrounds, and taught four food handler classes. I was even able to do some traveling and taught a food handler class on the White Mountain Apache Reservation a few hours away.



My project for the summer entailed working on the San Carlos Severe Injury Surveillance System. Injury data had been collected from previous years, and compiled prior to my arrival. When I arrived, I went through all the severe injury cases, and coded the information using a very specific injury and disease classification book (Internal Classification of Diseases, Revision 9, Clinical Modification (ICD-9-CM)). After coding all the injury types, and doing some additional data collection, I learned how to use Epi-Info, a statistical database computer program developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. I then entered all the severe injury cases for the years 1998 through 2001 into Epi-Info, and began the process of basic analysis of the data as well as graphing the data in Excel. By the end of the summer, I was able to put all my hard work into a final report that will be used to help health officials decide where future injury prevention resources should be allocated in an effort to reduce injuries on the Reservation.



Not really knowing what direction my career was heading, this was the perfect internship for me. I was able to learn and participate in many of the different aspects of the Environmental Health field, not to mention all the knowledge I gained about working with different cultures. Indian Health Service taught me how to be effective and promote safe practices within Reservation communities.

For anyone open to new experiences and wants to gain professional job skills, meet new people, and have a memorable summer, I would recommend applying for a COSTEP position.